



LINDA BUCKLEY FROM OCEAN'S FLOOR

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Ó Íochtar Mara (From Ocean’s Floor)		
1	I Fil Duine (Gráinne speaks of Diarmuid)	4’28
2	II Cridhe lán do smuaintighthibh (A heart made full of thought)	5’14
3	III Gealach agus Grian (Sun and Moon)	6’11
4	IV Áimhréidh (Entanglement)	5’53
Iarla Ó’Lionáird voice · Crash Ensemble · Linda Buckley <i>electronics</i>		
5	Fridur	12’02
Isabelle O’Connell <i>piano</i> · Linda Buckley <i>electronics</i>		
6	Discordia	11’17
Joby Burgess <i>percussion (canna sonora)</i> · Linda Buckley <i>electronics</i>		
7	Haza	14’29
ConTempo Quartet · Linda Buckley <i>electronics</i>		
8	Kyrie	9’50
Linda Buckley voice & <i>electronics</i>		
9	Exploding Stars	8’17
Darragh Morgan <i>violin</i> · Linda Buckley <i>electronics</i>		
Total timing		78’17



ConTempo Quartet
Bogdan Sofei *violin*
Ingrid Nicola *violin*
Andreea Banciu *viola*
Adrian Mantu *cello*

Crash Ensemble
Ciaran McCabe *violin*
Maria Ryan *violin*
Lisa Dowdall *viola*
Kate Ellis *cello*

photo © Olesya Zdorovetska

How to introduce Linda Buckley's music? Perhaps it helps to begin with a conclusion, something the late Bob Gilmore wrote about her work in 2008. For Gilmore what made Linda Buckley's music so special was its engagement 'with an area of experience that new music is generally shy of, which, simplified and reduced to a single word, I'd call ecstasy [...] an emotional response to the world that sees the bright places of life as clearly as the dark.'

A glance across the track listing on this debut album suggests that Gilmore was onto something. Each title explicitly identifies a state of being, sometimes in the world of things, but mostly in the world of the spirit. Gilmore was right about the music's ecstatic qualities too. Buckley loves how things sound, whether they be acoustic instruments or the electronic tones which create a halo of resonance around the instruments, and her work celebrates this sense of music as an intensely sensuous medium. When I first got to know her we talked about her aesthetic sensibility and it was striking how readily she identified it as distinctly Irish. For Buckley being Irish means having access to both a profound melancholy and the most illuminating moments of ecstasy.

As is the case for many Irish artists of her generation, Linda Buckley inhabits a world that

is both local and international. Born in 1979, the youngest of nine children, she grew up on her parents' farm on the Old Head of Kinsale in County Cork. She stayed close to home for her first degree, studying at University College Cork, and then went on to Trinity College Dublin for her doctoral studies. But she has spent extended periods abroad for artist-residencies, in Berlin, Iceland (a particular favourite, of which more later), Sweden, Italy, a Fulbright Fellowship in New York, and now in Glasgow, teaching at the Royal Scottish Conservatoire where she is the first woman to be appointed to a composition post.

What makes Buckley unusual is the way in which she connects aspects of traditional music – mostly Irish, but sometimes from other cultures too – to 'new music', that loose collection of evolving genres, styles and tendencies that connects composers and performers around the world. Generations of Irish musicians have sought ways of relating the music of their homeland with other musical traditions but the relationship between the classical and Irish traditions has been perhaps the most awkward.

Linda Buckley is better qualified than most to resolve this dilemma. In her family the singing and playing of Irish music was part of everyday

life and in *Ó Íochtar Mara* (2015), the most substantial work on this album, she draws on this legacy. She is a practitioner of sean nós, the Irish 'old style' of elaborately ornamented solo singing, and *Ó Íochtar Mara* ('From Ocean's Floor') was written for the voice of Iarla Ó Lionáird, one of the finest contemporary exponents of sean nós, accompanied by a string quartet and electronic drones.

The work is a song-cycle, each of the four movements based on Gaelic poems and each anchored by an electronic drone. In the first movement the drone centres on B, and the strings weave simple patterns in and around Ó Lionáird's vocal part. The second movement works in a similar way, voice and strings moving rather more quickly and continuously, but at no point does a particular melodic line or figure emerge as the focus of the music. This quality of continuous variation defines the music's elusive beauty. It is also a defining characteristic of the greatest sean nós singers and this aspect of *Ó Íochtar Mara*, as much as Ó Lionáird's presence, places the work within the tradition.

In the third and longest movement, Ó Lionáird moves centre-stage with two extended vocal passages, the first accompanied only by a deep drone on A (the composer says that this was

derived from the sound of one of the milking machines on the Buckley farm) and the second underscored by long notes in the strings. In the final movement, the electronic sounds become more mobile, shadowing the main pitch centres in the voice, and the string quartet returns to the more subsidiary role it played in the first movement. Two whispered passages interrupt the singing before the music ends with what the score describes as 'soft "white noise" bowing [...] like waves of the sea': a haunting ending to a work which is, as she acknowledges, 'one of the most personal things I've ever done'.

Soon after completing *Ó Íochtar Mara* Linda Buckley moved to New York City on a Fulbright scholarship. Relocations often raise questions about belonging and Buckley's extended stay in New York raised existential questions that inform *Haza* (2016), for string quartet with electronics. *Haza* was written for the ConTempo Quartet, who commissioned it for a programme that also included Bartók's Fourth String Quartet. Something of the spirit of that music informs Buckley's work, particularly in its latter stages: Haza is the Hungarian word for 'home' and during her time in New York Buckley was very conscious that Bartók had spent his last years there, in poor health, short of money and longing for his homeland.

Haza occupies a musical landscape familiar from *Ó Íochtar Mara*, using sustained electronic tones to create harmonic foundations for the string quartet, often blurring the distinction between live and pre-recorded sounds. The work is in three continuous sections, and in the first two, subtitled ‘Wonder’ and ‘Float’, the instrumental textures are mostly slow, constantly varied, yet consistently athematic. The third section, ‘Rise, Home’, picks up where ‘Float’ finished but soon the texture starts to break up, with the quartet and electronics at odds with one another. As the music becomes more animated, there’s an exhilarating modulation in which the music slips down a tone to the Dorian mode on A, the electronics fade out and in a brief coda the live instruments break free. It’s a conclusion that brings *Haza* to somewhere quite different from its beginnings fifteen minutes earlier: not ‘home’, yet somewhere recognisable, transformed, elevated.

The other instrumental works on this album also trace a similar expressive arc: an initial territory is established and sustained, only for the music to take an often surprisingly different turn. The piano piece ***Fridur*** (the Icelandic word for ‘peace’) opens on a chilled landscape, with resonant harmonies floating above the glacial flow of the electronics – all very peaceful, all

very ambient – but after about four minutes the tone becomes first more resolute and then more varied. A shimmering semiquaver tremolo is introduced and the music becomes a more dynamic flux in which these various elements ebb and flow. Over the last ten years Iceland has been a sort of second spiritual home for Buckley and *Fridur* seems to invoke a particularly Icelandic ‘peace’ that is quite uneasy, hard to maintain as the tectonic plates shift beneath the surface.

Discordia (2018) offers a more dystopian version of this progression. It was commissioned by Joby Burgess for his Canna Sonora, an instrument assembled from tuned, vertical aluminium rods that he strokes with rosin-impregnated gloves. Initially the other-worldly sonorities of the instrument seem to evoke another chilled Icelandic landscape but gradually they are challenged by other sorts of music. There’s an analogue synthesizer intervention (a bi-product from a Moog project that Buckley undertook with Jonathan Nangle) that tips the music into downtown New York, and the clangorous latter phase of *Discordia* channels Buckley’s dismay at the ugly populism of the general election that greeted her when she arrived in the USA in the autumn of 2016.

In ***Exploding Stars*** (2011) the same trajectory acquires a cosmic dimension. Once again we begin in a familiar place, Darragh Morgan’s bow crossing the strings of his violin, but by the end of the music this has been overwhelmed by the seething energy of the tape part, a journey that begins as a vision of the night sky and finishes in the star itself. There’s a personal journey here too.

As a young composer Buckley attended the Association of Irish Composers’ summer school, where one of the first professional instrumentalists to play any of her music was Darragh Morgan, and all the works with instruments on this album retain a sense of the instrument-electronic dialectic that she learnt as a student. But before *Exploding Stars* we hear ***Kyrie***, in which Linda Buckley’s own voice is immersed in a sea of electronic sounds. This is the closest the album comes to the mesmerising live-electronic performances that have become as important to Buckley as her composed works.

I began these notes with a conclusion; perhaps it’s right to finish with both a beginning and a promise of much more to come.

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Linda Buckley is an Irish composer who has written extensively for orchestra (BBC Symphony Orchestra, Dresdner Sinfoniker, RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra, Irish Chamber Orchestra), and has a particular interest in merging her classical training with the worlds of post punk, folk and ambient electronica. She is ‘one of the leading figures in the thriving Irish new music scene’ (Christopher Fox, *Tempo*) with her work being described as ‘exquisite’ (Philip Clark, *Gramophone*) ‘strange and beautiful’ (Richard Dyer, *Boston Globe*), and ‘fantastically brutal, reminiscent of the glitch music of acts such as Autechre’ (Liam Cagney, *Composing the Island*). Collaborations include work with experimental folk duo Anna & Elizabeth, Crash Ensemble, Liz Roche Dance Company, Iarla O’Lionaird, Icebreaker and Ensemble Mise-En. Linda studied Music at University College Cork, holds a Masters in Music & Media Technologies and PhD in Composition from Trinity College Dublin, a Fulbright Scholarship to New York and lectures in Composition at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

www.lindabuckley.org

Information about the artists on this disc can be found on NMC’s website:
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Ó Íochtar Mara (From Ocean’s Floor)

I Fil Duine 7th Century

Fil duine
frismad buide lemm díuterc,
día tibrinn in mbith mbuide,
huile, huile, cid díupert.

Traditional

II Cridhe lán do smuaintighthibh 16th Century

Cridhe lán do smuaintighthibh
tarla dhúinne ré n-imtheacht;
caidhe neach dá uaibhrighe
ris nách sgar bean a intleacht?

Brón mar fhás na fíneamhna
tarla oram re haimsir;
ní guth dhamhsa mímhéanma
tré a bhfaictheard dúinn do thaidhbhsibh.

Sgaradh éoin re fíoruisge,
nó is múchadh gréine gile,
mo sgaradh re sníomhthuirse
tar éis mo chompáin chridhe.

by Maghnas Ó Dómhnaill

III Gealach agus Grian
(from A Ógánaigh an chúil cheangailte) 18th Century

Agus shíl mé, a stóirín,
go mba ghealach agus grian thú,
agus shíl mé ina dhiaidh sin
go mba sneachta ar an sliabh thú,
agus shíl mé ina dhiaidh sin
go mba lóchrann ó Dhia thú,
nó go mba tú an réalt eolais
ag dul romham is 'mo dhiaidh thú

Traditional

I Gráinne speaks of Diarmuid

There is one
on whom I should gladly gaze,
to whom I would give the bright world,
all of it, all of it, though it be an unequal bargain.

translation by Gerard Murphy

II A heart made full of thought

A heart made full of thought
I had, before you left.
What man, however prideful,
but lost his perfect love?

Grief like the growing vine
came with time upon me.
Yet it is not through despair
I see your image still.

A bird lifting from clear water,
a bright sun put out –
such my parting, in troubled tiredness,
from the partner of my heart.

translation by Thomas Kinsella

III Sun and Moon
(from O youth of the loose bound hair)

And to me, my dear,
you were sun and moon,
and more than that
you were the snow on the hills,
and more than that still
you were a guiding-light from God,
or the star of knowledge
before and behind me.

translation by Ciarán Mac Murchaidh

IV Áimhréidh 20th Century

Siúil, a ghrá,
cois trá anocht –
siúil agus cuir uait
na deora –
éirigh agus siúil anocht

ná feac do ghlúin feasta
ag uaigh sin an tsléibhe
tá na blátha sin feoite
agus tá mo chnámhasa dreoite ...

(Labhraím leat anocht
ó íochtar mara –
labhraím leat gach oíche
ó íochtar mara ...)

shiúileas lá cois trá –
shiúileas go híochtar trá –
rinne tonn súgradh le tonn –
ligh an cúr bán mo chosa –
d’ardaíos mo shúil go mall
’gus ansiúd amuigh ar an domhain
in aimhréidh cúir agus toinne
chonaic an t-uaigneas i do shúil
’gus an doilíos i do ghnúis

shiúileas amach ar an domhain
ó ghlúin go com
agus ó chom go guaille
nó gur slogadh mé
sa doilíos ’gus san uaigneas.

by Caitlín Maude (1941-1982)
Courtesy of the Caitlin Maude Estate
Published by Cló Iar-Chonnacht

IV Entanglement

Walk, my love,
on the beach tonight –
walk, and put away your tears –
rise up and walk tonight

nevermore bend your knee
at that mountain grave
those flowers have withered
and my bones have rotted ...

(I speak to you tonight
from ocean’s floor –
I speak to you every night
from ocean’s floor ...)

I once walked on the beach –
I walked to the water’s edge –
wave frolicked with wave –
the white foam tongued my feet –
I slowly raised my eye
and there far out on the deep
where foam and wave tangle
I saw the loneliness in your eye
and the anguish in your face.

I walked out onto the deep
from knee to waist
and from waist to shoulder
until I was engulfed
by anguish and loneliness.

translation by Ciarán Mac Murchaidh

Thanks to all the musicians who took part in this journey – friends as well as performers, from my twenty year relationship with Crash Ensemble through to sharing stories of milking machine drones with Iarla Ó Lionáird, and Darragh Morgan being the first musician I ever wrote for, combining violin and electronics, at the age of eighteen. This sparked a love of merging instrumental and electronic textures, which is the thread running throughout the whole record. To Adrian Hart and David Lefeber for their sonic magic in recording, mixing and production, and Craig Carry for creating the beautiful cover artwork. Thanks to Nicol Hay for his encouragement and support, and I wish to dedicate this to my parents Mary and Daniel Buckley, who instilled in me the love of music, and are the strongest people I know. – **Linda Buckley**



Ciaran McCabe, Maria Ryan, Kate Ellis, Lisa Dowdall (Crash Ensemble) at Hellfire Studio, Dublin



Darragh Morgan, Linda Buckley and David Lefeber (Producer/Engineer) at All Saints, East Finchley, London



Joby Burgess at All Saints, East Finchley, London



Isabelle O'Connell at Hellfire Studios, Dublin

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DAVID LEFEBER *Recording Engineer & Producer*

Fridur, Haza and *Ó íochtar Mara* were recorded at Hellfire Studio, Dublin, Ireland on 19-20 December 2019

ADRIAN HART *Recording Engineer & Producer*

Kyrie was recorded in Brooklyn apartment in November 2016

LINDA BUCKLEY *Recording Engineer & Producer*

DAVID LEFEBER *Mastering*

COLIN MATTHEWS *Executive Producer for NMC*

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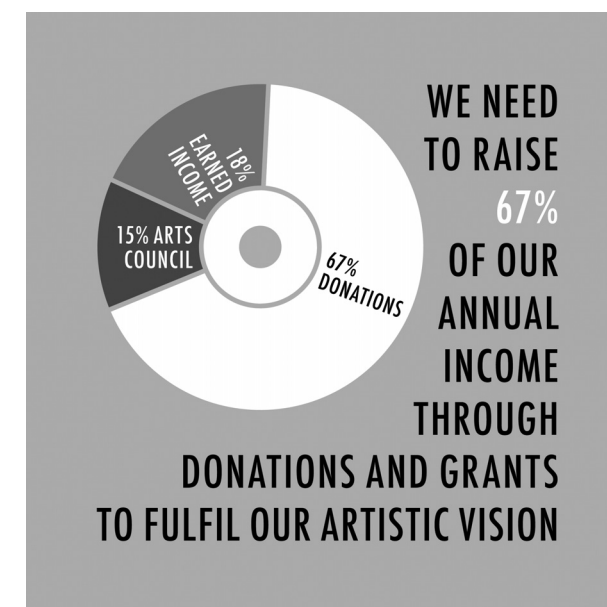
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